

Preaching to a New Choir: COASST and Citizen Science

Todd Hass and Julia K. Parrish

University of Washington, School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences

COASST (Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team) is a Washington-based beached bird survey program designed to couple “hard science” with “public outreach.” By monitoring the deposition of beachcast carcasses, COASST volunteers provide high quality data on the status and trends of coastal resources—mainly seabirds—for the tripartite purposes of science, informed management and conservation, and proactive citizen involvement and action. Most COASST volunteers are drawn from coastal communities and lack field experience with bird—so how can local beachcombers become effective citizen scientists and stewards? By emphasizing simplicity and redundancy in its field guide and data sheets, COASST invites participation by lay persons while ensuring high data quality (in their initial year COASSTers have enjoyed > 90 percent success in bird identification). Frequent and timely interactions among volunteers and COASST coordinators (both in person and via our interactive web site) stimulate even more activity and improve accuracy. In this presentation, we will outline these methods and our first-year results. We will also discuss the rapid expansion of the program in terms of volunteer numbers, partnerships, and geographic coverage. Finally, we will discuss how COASST uses beached birds as indicators of the health of the nearshore environment through stable isotope analyses, mark-recapture studies, and so on.

The Rapid Shoreline Inventory: A New Partnership Program for Collection of Detailed Habitat Data from Puget Sound Shorelines by Volunteers

Lisa Younger, Zach Ferdana, Tom Dean and Jacques White

People for Puget Sound

Kevin Ranker

Friends of the San Juans

Both a lack of compiled information and gaps in critical information are preventing marine scientists and nearshore policy experts from developing a thorough understanding of nearshore conditions and resource management needs in the Puget Sound basin. The Rapid Shoreline Inventory (RSI) is a new project created by People for Puget Sound that links the information needs of local resource managers to well-trained volunteer stewards who collect detailed data about marine and estuarine shorelines. The RSI consists of 4 key components: 1) identification of resource information needs, 2) careful classroom and field training of volunteers, 3) a rapid inventory of contiguous 150 ft. sections of Puget Sound shoreline, and 4) creation and maintenance of the associated GIS database and web site. The project was piloted in the summer of 2000 on Kitsap, San Juan and Whatcom County shorelines. Results of the initial year of investigation will be presented.